

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANAGU 03546 300159Z

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ACTION ARA-20

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AMEMBASSY PANAMA

USCINCSO

S E C R E T MANAGUA 3546

DEPT PASS ALL AMERICAN REPUBLIC DIPLOMATIC POSTS

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, NU

SUBJECT: TRANSFER OF USCINCSO COMMAND

REF: STATE 164406

1. THE COUNTRY TEAM HAS CAREFULLY ANALYZED THE ISSUES RAISED BY REFTTEL. SPECIFICALLY, IT IS OUR OPINION THAT THERE MIGHT BE CERTAIN MINIMAL ADVANTAGES IN REMOVING SOUTHCOM FROM THE PANAMA CANAL ZONE, IN VIEW OF THE CONSTANT ISSUE THAT IS BEING MADE OVER ITS PRESENCE BY PANAMANIAN LEADERS. THE COUNTRY TEAM FEELS, HOWEVER, THAT THE UNILATERAL DECISION TO REMOVE SOUTHCOM WITHOUT RECEIVING A QUID PRO QUO FROM PANAMA IN CONNECTION WITH NEGOTIATIONS, COULD BE LOOKED UPON BY LATIN NATIONS AS A DEMONSTRATION OF US WEAKNESS AND A LESSENING OF INTERESTS IN THIS HEMISPHERE, RATHER THAN AS A GESTURE OF GOODWILL.

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SECRET

PAGE 02 MANAGU 03546 300159Z

2. IT IS ASSUMED THAT THE DISCUSSION IS LIMITED TO THE REMOVAL OF SOUTHCOM ITSELF AND NOT THE SUBORDINATE COMMANDS, WHICH ARE THE ACTIVE DEFENSE ELEMENTS OF THE CANAL. THE QUESTION ARISES AS TO WHETHER THE REMOVAL OF SOUTHCOM HEADQUARTERS CONSTITUTING AS IT WOULD, THE REMOVAL OF A COMBINED COMMAND AND APPROXIMATELY 300 PERSONNEL, WOULD BE CONSIDERED SIGNIFICANT BY THE PANAMANIAN WITH THEIR SPECIAL INTERESTS, WHEREAS WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE CONSIDERED SIGNIFICANT BY THE REST OF LATIN AMERICA, ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT CONVINCED THAT THE PRESENCE OF SOUTHCOM IS A BURNING ISSUE IN LATIN AMERICA. CONSIDERATION WILL, OBVIOUSLY, HAVE TO BE GIVEN TO WHAT IS TO BECOME OF THE HIGHLY NECESSARY AND VALUABLE TRAINING FACILITIES WHICH PRESENTLY ARE OPERATED BY SOUTHCOM, AND WHICH ARE USED BY A GOODLY NUMBER OF LATIN NATIONS. IF SOUTHCOM IS MOVED, THE COUNTRY TEAM FEELS THAT IT SHOULD BE MOVED TO THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE UNITED STATES. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES, IN OUR BELIEF, WOULD PUERTO RICO BE ACCEPTABLE. THE COUNTRY TEAM ALSO BELIEVES THAT IT SHOULD NOT BE MOVED TO WASHINGTON, SINCE A REGIONAL COMMAND WOULD BE LOST IN A WORLD-WIDE ORIENTED MILITARY STRUCTURE.

3. TO SUMMARIZE OUR POSITION ON THE QUESTION RAISED IN PARA 2A, IT IS OUR BELIEF THAT SOUTHCOM SHOULD ONLY BE MOVED AS PART OF THE LARGER SETTLEMENT OF THE ISSUES RELATING TO THE CONTINUED US PRESENCE IN THE CANAL ZONE.

4. WITH REFERENCE TO THE QUESTION RAISED IN SECTION B OF PARA 2, THE GOVERNMENT OF NICARAGUA WOULD NOT BE IN FAVOR OF THE REMOVAL OR LESSENING OF US MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE CANAL ZONE, SINCE IT CONSIDERS THE CONTINUED CONTROL AND OPERATION OF THE PANAMA CANAL VITAL TO ITS SHIPPING INTERESTS. THE HIGHEST OFFICIALS OF NICARAGUA HAVE EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT THIS WOULD BE EQUALLY TRUE WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN WITH RESPECT TO SEVERAL OTHER COUNTRIES WITH ONLY WEST COAST PORTS IN THIS HEMISPHERE, SINCE THE OPERATION OF THE PANAMA CANAL AT REASONABLE RATES OF PASSAGE IS VITAL TO THEIR ECONOMIES. NICARAGUA WOULD HAVE GREATER CONFIDENCE IN A US OPERATED CANAL THAN ONE CONTROLLED BY ANY OTHER COUNTRY.

5. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT MILITARY ASSISTANCE OPERATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA COULD BE ADMINISTERED SATISFACTORILY FROM A COMMAND LOCATED IN THE US. IT WOULD PRESENT DIFFICULTIES WHICH PRESENTLY DO

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PAGE 03 MANAGU 03546 300159Z

NOT EXIST FROM PANAMA, BUT THE SUCCESSFUL CARRYING OUT OF THE ACTIVITIES INCLUDING JOINT AND COMBINED EXERCISES, DISASTER RELIEF, AND OTHER ACTIVITIES COULD CERTAINLY BE ACHIEVED. AS FAR AS NICARAGUA ITSELF IS CONCERNED, HOWEVER, THE LOCATION OF SOUTHCOM IN THE CANAL ZONE IS IDEAL. THE DECISION, THEREFORE, OBVIOUSLY MUST REST EXCLUSIVELY ON POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS PRIMARILY IN CONNECTION WITH THE CONTINUED VIABILITY OF THE US MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE CANAL ZONE AND THE NEGOTIATIONS RELATED THERETO.

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